



Press Release

Forced Dispersion

Human Status in Syria: The Demographic Report

9th of December 2016

The Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR), an independent not-for-profit research center, launched its report “Forced Dispersion” in cooperation with the Institute for Social Justice and Conflict Resolution at the Lebanese American University. This report, the first of a series of reports on human status in Syria, diagnoses the population question in Syria before and during the crisis, based on participatory rights-based approach. This report attempts to present an in-depth understanding of the population status in the shadow of the crisis, together with the risks associated with its continuation, and to develop future alternatives toward ending the crisis and overcoming its impact.

Before the crisis, Syria suffered from institutional bottleneck because of the inefficiency, lack of transparency and accountability, and the absence of political participation of the people. These conditions caused developmental distortions such as low productivity, weak societal participation in the development process, and increased inequality as the expansion of crony capitalism which diverted achievements away from society priorities. Moreover, public policies neglected the population question, frequently engaging with it from a narrow demographic perspective, with the adoption of approaches close to neomalthusianism.

This report applied methodological amendments on the Syrian demographic indicators before the crisis, the results show that the average annual population growth rate of the Syrian residents reached 2.9 per cent for the period 2004-2010 (compared to 2.45 per cent according to the official estimations), following an increase that reached 2.75 percent between the years 1994 and 2004. This shift indicates the failure of population-related programs and policies that targeted reducing population growth rates, and it provides additional proof of the inefficiency of family planning programs in isolation from inclusive development. These indicators also show a structural deficit in the development process, through the stability of the crude mortality rate of about 3.8 per thousand between the years 2000 and 2007, which rose to 4.4 per thousand in 2010. This profoundly reflects increasing deprivation of appropriate health services and living conditions.

The deterioration in the direction and speed of the demographic transition partially explained by the slow improvement in education, the decrease in employment and labor force participation rates particularly among females, and imbalanced development between governorates and between rural and urban areas. The beginning of the past decade of the millennium witnessed stability in fertility rates, which then rose again in 2007 reaching 5.2 in 2010, to become one of the highest fertility rates in the world. The accumulation of the developmental challenges without

the will to reform, forced people to migrate, bringing rates of the net external migration relatively higher in the 1970s and 1980s. The rates declined at the beginning of the 1990s, and then rebound after 1994 to settle in the last decade.

The social movement that started in March 2011 created a climate of optimism among those who demanded positive change in Syria. They hoped to build new institutions that would bridge the gap between realities and people's aspirations, and which would overcome the institutional bottlenecks and the sense of state alienation. The movement voiced the values of freedom and dignity. At the beginning of the social movement, the subjugating powers of political oppression, fundamentalism, and fanaticism, on both the domestic and international levels were able to resist such change; as time passed, they oppressed the public movement and transferred the confrontation to a nihilistic armed conflict that has violated all rights, including the right to life.

The crisis has led to a dramatic rise in mortality rate among population. The crude mortality rate increased from 4.4 per thousand in 2010 to 10.8 per thousand in 2015, accounting for the indirect and direct deaths of about 1.9 per cent of the total population. The life expectancy declined significantly for males and for all age groups, especially the younger ages, where a male's life expectancy at birth retreated from 69.7 in 2010 to 48.4 in 2015. The decline of life expectancy was less acute among females because of the lack of direct engagement of hostilities; female life expectancy at birth decreased from 72 years in 2010 to 65 years in 2015.

The intolerable conditions of the crisis, the widening scale of chaos and insecurity, and the intensification of military operations, forced millions of Syrians to leave their places of origin and move elsewhere, inside or outside of Syria, while relying entirely on domestic and international humanitarian assistance and suffering the loss of their dignity and their right to a decent life. The total population inside Syria was 20237 people in 2015, about 31 per cent of whom were displaced, along with 4063 refugees and migrants. Consequently, the portion of the population that had not moved was about 57 per cent of the total population inside and outside Syria. This population drain still continues.

The crisis changed gender, age, and education structures in the population as a result of various factors, including the increased number of males' deaths comparing to females' as well as the impact of displacement, migration, and asylum-seeking. The percent of female from total population who were not moved, reached 51 per cent, up from about 49 per cent in 2010. The proportion of women among IDPs reached 57 per cent, while that of people aged 15-39 declined, particularly among displaced persons, as a result of migration or involvement in military operations. These shifts were accompanied by a relative rise in the proportion of other age groups, especially children below 15 years of age.

The crude birth rate witnessed a notable decrease, from 38.8 per thousand in 2010 to 28.5 per thousand in 2014, which reflected a decline in total fertility rate to 3.7 in 2014. These results contradict many assumptions about increased fertility rates during crisis, particularly among displaced people. The lack of security, the deterioration of living conditions and the general sense of instability have been accompanied by a decline in marriage rates in many of the areas studied. Households have suffered from family fragmentation and difficult living conditions imposed by

the crisis that have led to the spread of early marriages and the exploitation of children and women 's rights.

The displacement movement inside Syria has occurred in all the Syrian governorates, the intensity of the reception or displacement of persons varying according to the individual governorate. These differences are largely associated to the location of conflict zones and regions, lack of security, the spread of violations, and the deterioration of living conditions.

About half of the IDPs live in rented houses, thereby adding to their financial burden; relatives and friends hosted about 30 per cent, while 13.5 per cent live in formal and informal shelters. Of all IDPs, 62 per cent prefer to return to their areas of origin; these numbers indicate the importance of alleviating the suffering of the displaced persons and ensuring their return to homes in decent conditions.

This forced dispersion of the Syrian people during the crisis has had significant political, social, and economic impact on the population. The crisis dispersed the Syrian population through displacement, migration, and increasing numbers of deaths and injuries from the continued fighting by subjugating powers to subordinate people regardless of any moral constraints and of the society's needs and aspirations.

This report suggests priorities for population policies to halt the conflict and overcome its impacts. In this context, dramatic changes in population policies should be adopted toward priorities of stopping the killing, guaranteeing the right to life, decomposing the economics of violence, and facing the challenges of forced internal and external migration to regain people and social cohesion. The main issue during the crisis is to build population policies within effective and participatory institutions that take into account developmental and humanitarian dimensions in preparing, implementing, and monitoring phases of any policy. Moreover, changes of the actors' roles should be taken into account in building new institutions and contributing to future population policies. These actors include the state, emerged local powers, civil society, private sector, and the international community.

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Syrian Center for Policy Research

Web: www.scpr-syria.org ; email: info@scpr-syria.org